

THE MIND'S EYE

A Liberal Arts Journal
Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts



Remembering Charlie *A tribute by Steve Green*

A Story or Two for 2001 *Convocation Address by Julia Alvarez*

[Re]cognizing Hamlet *By Meera Tamaya*

The Note *Fiction by Paul Milenski*

**Contested Beliefs and Rebellion
in a New England Mill Town**

Sprague Electric Workers in North Adams *By Maynard Seider*

Two Poems *By Abbot Cutler*

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The Mind's Eye, a journal of scholarly and creative work, is edited and published twice annually by the faculty of Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts. While emphasizing articles of scholarly merit, *The Mind's Eye* focuses on a general communication of ideas of interest to a liberal arts college. We welcome expository essays as well as fiction, poetry, and art. Please refer to the inside back cover for a list of submission guidelines.

Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts

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THE MIND'S EYE

Fall 1997

The Editor's File 4

Remembering Charlie 6

A tribute

By Steve Green

A Story or Two for 2001 8

Convocation Address, Fall 1997

By Julia Alvarez

[Re]cognizing Hamlet: 17

A Cognitive Approach

By Meera Tamaya

The Note 36

Fiction

By Paul Milenski

Contested Beliefs and Rebellion 39

in a New England Mill Town:

Sprague Electric Workers in

North Adams

By Maynard Seider

Two Poems 62

By Abbot Cutler

Contributors 64

On the Cover:

November Trees, Lino-cut by Leon Peters

The Editor's File

It is a great privilege to introduce the new *Mind's Eye* to the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts community. Quite a few things have changed at the college, including its name, since the last edition of *The Mind's Eye* was published in 1989. That edition, put out five years after its founding editor Charlie McIsaac had passed away, was the last to be issued in the original eight-twelve page format. This new edition is a larger but not necessarily more ambitious undertaking. As Steve Green's eloquent testimony to Charlie attests, the original "journal of review and comment" set its goals very high, and our more expansive offspring seeks to match the earlier journal's standards of literary quality and provocative subject matter while providing an opportunity to feature, among other things, longer and more extensively researched articles.

We are pleased to be able to publish a number of exceptional articles and creative works in this inaugural edition. Meera Tamaya's essay on "[Re]cognizing *Hamlet*" shared the 1997 Faculty Lecture Award and is related to a manuscript she is currently completing on a "cognitive approach" to one of Shakespeare's greatest plays. Maynard Seider's fine article on the Sprague Electric workers was developed from a larger study, a portion of which he has already turned into a much acclaimed theatrical production, *The Sprague Years*. We are pleased as well to be able to feature a guest contribution to this first edition, the Fall 1997 Convocation Address by celebrated author Julia Alvarez, which is reprinted here with her permission. Further contributions by Massachusetts College faculty

include poems by Abbot Cutler and fiction by Paul Milenski.

The coincidence which finds two pieces by members of *The Mind's Eye* Editorial Board in this first edition resulted from a highly successful competition for the 1997 Faculty Lecture Award, where both the Tamaya and Seider articles received an award and honorable mention. The Editorial Board, meeting without Professors Tamaya and Seider, agreed with the Faculty Lecture Award Committee concerning the quality of their essays and decided to publish them in this inaugural edition.

The journal continues to seek articles from all members of our faculty and to welcome guest contributions as well as commentary in the form of letters to the editor. The deadline for submitting material for the Spring *Mind's Eye* is January 15, 1998.

Remembering Charlie

Along with his duties as Editor of The Mind's Eye, Charlie McIsaac was also the Director of Library Services at then North Adams State College from 1969 until his death in 1984. The following tribute by Steve Green, a member of the original Editorial Board, first appeared in the 1987 Mind's Eye, an issue published in conjunction with the dedication of the McIsaac Reading Room on the second floor of Freel Library.

Shortly after his cat Buffy died in 1982, Charlie McIsaac wrote a brief remembrance, published later in *The Mind's Eye*. It's a lovely piece, sentimental but not maudlin, and like all his work beautifully written. Charlie ended it saying,

Knowing he is not here any more comes to us in bits and pieces. We cannot give him up in one leap. Love is not like that. We loved him dearly.

We are grateful that he came into this house, a blue-eyed buff and white kitten who added riches to our lives. He has taken a part of us with him, and we are diminished. We have let him go, but we cannot forget.

Charlie McIsaac died in November 1984. I find that I am one of many who cannot forget him and, like those others, I, too, am diminished by his death. But Charlie would not have cared whether people remembered him as a person. Self-importance, ego, pretension were not what Charlie was about. Words, ideas, and causes

were Charlie's life. He genuinely cared how people spoke and wrote, how and what they thought. He worried about whether we would be sensible enough to preserve our planet, our society, our community, and ourselves for a livable future.

It is difficult now for me to think about the arms race, nuclear weapons, environmental degradation, poverty, or any of the survival issues faced by so many without remembering Charlie's wisdom and counsel. It is just as hard to think about any of the foibles which beset us as individuals without remembering Charlie's compassion and forgiveness. And it is impossible for me to take note of the arrogance or hypocrisy of those who would impose on others, without remembering Charlie's integrity and principle.

At his funeral I said that Charlie McIsaac served as an extra measure of conscience for us all. His editorial commentary in *The Mind's Eye* testifies to his passionate concern with the big issues. He knew, as we all know, that they won't take care of themselves, but require our vigilance, critique, and, if necessary, revolt if we are to survive.

I also remember Charlie as tall, slow in movement, either grumbling or chuckling, thoughtful, concerned. And so many of us remember him whenever we think, worry, talk, or write about the problems of the world. As a stimulator of conscience Charlie continues to serve all of us well.

Steve Green

A Story or Two for 2001

Convocation Address, Fall 1997

BY JULIA ALVAREZ

When I was a little girl growing up in the Dominican Republic, the two most important days in childhood were your name day and your birthday. Your name day was the saint's day after whom you had been named, and your birthday, of course, was the day you were born. Both were celebrated with a gift, maybe a party, and always a story.

On my birthday, my mother would always tell me the story of the day I was born.

On my saint's day, my mother, or sometimes my godmother, would tell me the story of the saint—in my case, Altagracia—after whom I had been named.

Well, I have come to North Adams on a very special occasion. First, as I understand from Dean Collins, your name has officially been changed to Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts. So this convocation represents the first time this college convenes with its new name. This convocation is, in part, a name-day party.

But this is also a very special birth date—we are gathering together to welcome the class of the year 2001. For people of my generation, who grew up in the sixties, the year 2001 has a special ring to it. Along with the Beatles and Woodstock, Stanley Kubrick's film, *2001: A Space Odyssey*, was one of those defining cultural hall-

marks. In our imagination, the year 2001 came to represent the arrival of the future with all its luminous possibilities and potential disasters.

Today, you, the class of 2001, represent that future. You will be the first class to graduate in the new millennium. I feel goosebumps just thinking of it.

So this convocation is also a birthday, your birthday, your entry into this community dedicated to a liberal arts education. In four years, we will celebrate your entry into the world of that new millennium, 2001. Your education here in this community for the next four years will prepare you for the role you will play later in that world. So, this is both a joyous occasion and very serious one. This is the beginning of your odyssey into your own life.

What do we do on such a momentous occasion? Well, going back to the old tradition of my native culture, this is the time for a story, or given the fact that so many celebrations have come together, this is the time for a story or two.

I have already told you one of those stories. In my novel, *In the Time of the Butterflies*, which many of you have read in your first-year orientation program, I told you the true story of three brave women, the Mirabal sisters, who lived in the Dominican Republic at the same time I was growing up. It was they who started the underground against our bloody dictatorship. Their code name in that underground was, *las Mariposas*, the Butterflies.

But I don't want to repeat myself and tell you that story again. Instead, this morning, I want to tell you another story, which I call, "On Becoming a Butterfly," and it is really not a story, but straight talk about the process of becoming one of the butterflies that you have read about in my book.

First, let's define our terms. What do I mean by becoming a butterfly? First, I don't mean any touchy-feely, gushy-Hallmark-card, sentimentalized definition of butterfly. I remind you that in Greek mythology, butterflies were symbols for the soul. So the process I am talking about is the process whereby you become a

person who is more than a creature, a person of compassion, a humane as well as a human being, a person who is living the larger version of himself or herself with all the doors and windows of the self wide open to the world.

This process of becoming a butterfly is, in fact, what getting an education is all about. Why do we read the great stories? Why do we learn the discipline of a science or of an art form? To become that large-hearted, broad-thinking person, which is what we mean by an educated person.

This is actually a life-time process. As Chaucer, one of the first great British poets, exclaimed, *the lyf so short, the craft so long to lerne*. One life is just not long enough for you to grow those wings. But your college education is a good start.

So here is the short version of that education. After many more years at it than you, I think I've come up with the three basic rules of becoming a butterfly.

Number One: This is the part we always want to forget about. If you want to be a butterfly, you've got to put up with being a caterpillar. A lowly, wormy creature, inching along on the dirt, closed up in some cocoon, not a single promise of wings. In other words, you've got to risk failure and make a lot of mistakes and put in the hard work of learning to fly.

Let me give you an example from history and then a personal example.

Think of the Butterflies I wrote about, the incredible courage it took for them to found an underground in one of the bloodiest and longest-lasting dictatorships of the 20th century. At a time when no one dared breathe a word against the regime, in a generation and in a culture where women were not encouraged to have public lives, these women risked their lives. Think of the sacrifices they endured, the imprisonment, the torture, the terror of that final ambush. Think of their husbands who had to face the murder of their wives. Think of their sons and daughters, who lost their mothers at a young age. Think of the long years after the dictatorship when it

seemed the worm phase would never end—military coup, civil war, disappearances, a marine invasion, pseudo-democracy.

And year after year, many Dominicans kept heart, they did not forget, they put in the hard work. Finally, just last year, thirty-six years after the death of the Butterflies, the Dominicans went to the polls. They elected a young, forward-looking president, Leonel Fernandez, whose family like my own had spent many years as exiles in Nueva York. And guess who they elected as vice president: Jaime David, one of the nephews of the Mirabal sisters, who was four years old the day his aunts were killed. And the second in command in the State Department is now Minou, who was also four years old the day her mother, Minerva Mirabal, was murdered on that lonely country road. The children of the Butterflies are now in charge. The dream of the Butterflies is slowly being realized.

More personally, in my own life, I know that a long caterpillar phase is the name of the game if you want to reach that butterfly phase. For me this has meant many years of struggle to become the writer I am today.

I grew up in another language, in another world, in the fifties in a dictatorship in a little island in the Caribbean. As a girl, I was not expected to get much of an education at all. My grandmother, who only went up to fourth grade, used to tell the story that she only picked up a book when she heard the teacher's donkey braying as it climbed up the mountain to her house. Needless to say, I was not encouraged to be a student or a reader and certainly not a writer of books.

We were also growing up in the same dictatorship as the Mirabal sisters. In a school just down the road from where I was going to school, a student wrote an essay in which he praised Trujillo, our dictator, as the father of our country. The teacher commented that certainly Trujillo was one of the fathers of our country, but there were others. The boy, the son of a general, must have gone home and told his father. That night the teacher, his wife, and his two young children disappeared.

I grew up being warned that one must never ever tell stories.

But life has many turns. In 1960, my father's companions in the underground were arrested. My father was next. We left the country in a hurry on August 6, 1960. I was ten years old. Less than four months later, the Mirabal sisters were murdered. At the time, I didn't know how lucky we had been. All I could see were the losses.

Overnight, we had lost everything, our country, our home, our extended family structure, our economic security, our language. We arrived in this country at a time in history that was not very welcoming to people who were different, whose skins were a different color, whose language didn't sound like English. For the first time in my life I experienced prejudice and playground cruelty, which was no big deal when compared to the devastating cruelty of grown men back where we had come from, but when you're a child, such experiences can be crushing. I struggled with a language and a culture I didn't understand. I was heartbroken and homesick.

But sometimes it is these hard caterpillar moments that lead us to our dreams. Because I felt so isolated, I discovered books and the world of the imagination where everybody was welcomed. I became a reader, and soon I began to dream of becoming a writer.

But that dream of becoming a writer required hard work. There were a lot of barriers in my way. I might have left a dictatorship, the Dominican Republic of the fifties, but I had entered a United States where the Equal Rights Amendment had not been passed, where the civil rights movement was just getting underway, where multiculturalism and bilingualism were still unheard of.

And so the education I received gave me no models, no proof that a woman like me could be an American writer. I read the Canon, the great works of English literature, but there was no voice like my own, no story like my own. I assumed that someone like me couldn't be a writer. In fact, I was told once that it couldn't be done.

In college a famous poet whom I greatly admired announced one day that no poet could write in a language that he hadn't first said "Mama" in. In other words, you couldn't be a poet and an immigrant. My secret fears were confirmed.

But the important thing is that I kept writing. I kept sending my work out. I kept working on those darn wings.

Finally, in 1991, when I was forty-one years old and had been writing for twenty years, I published my first novel, *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents*. The manuscript had already been rejected by several publishers. But then a little publisher, Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, and a wonderful, skilled editor, Shannon Ravenel, saw potential in my work and gave me a chance. The book has sold over 250,000 copies to date.

What did I tell you? Stay with it. Do your caterpillar work.

Rule number two: And this is very important as you are mucking around in the dirt, struggling with jobs, raising families, earning a living. It is easy to forget what it is you are struggling for. So, if you want to be a butterfly, rule number two is: Don't forget where you are going.

I still recall a poem written years ago when I was teaching poetry in the schools in Kentucky. A young student, Katie, in 10th grade wrote:

Why is it
I reach for the stars
but I never make it
past the front door?

Katie, girl, I wanted to say, welcome to the human condition. We're all torn between our daily responsibilities, our very real creaturely needs, our limitations, and our far-reaching, star-catching dreams. To give up on that struggle is to become a diminished person, a person without a chance of becoming a butterfly.

What helps me remember where I am going is the company of great books.

There's an old Yiddish story about a rabbi who walks out in a rich neighborhood and meets a watchman walking up and down. "For whom are you working?" the rabbi asks. The watchman tells him, and then in his turn, he asks the rabbi, "And whom are you working for, rabbi?" The words strike the rabbi like a shaft. "I am

not working for anybody just yet," he barely manages to reply. Then he walks up and down beside the man for a long time and finally asks him, "Will you be my servant?" The watchman says, "I should like to, but what would be my duties?"

"To remind me," the rabbi says.

I think that is really the purpose of all great literature, to remind us.

Reading *Middlemarch* I am reminded to strive like Dorothea for the deepest, richest life of the spirit. Reading *Song of Solomon* I am reminded that the enslavement of another enslaves me. Reading *The Odyssey* I am reminded that a man goes through many incarnations in order to arrive where he belongs. Reading Emily Dickinson I am reminded to spread my hands wide and gather paradise. And on and on, great books are my night watchmen.

And along with books, my other great helpers have been my teachers. I am talking both about teachers I have had in school, hard-working men and women who will do anything including riding donkeys up a mountain in order to teach me something of value, as well as ordinary people I have met along the way who by their example or by something they say or do, teach me something I really needed to learn in order to keep going. These teachers need not be intellectuals or people with impressive credentials. I remember Spike Lee saying in an interview that one of the great lessons in his life has been that you can learn things from people who are dumber than you. There are all kinds of intelligence, and the one you might need at a certain moment in your life might not be butterfly intelligence, but cocoon intelligence, worm intelligence. Avail yourself of all of your helpers if you want to achieve your dreams.

Finally, the last rule: for becoming a butterfly after you've put in your caterpillar time, after you've found helpers to remind you of your dreams, is—and this one is my favorite—Spread your wings.

I remember how after several years of collecting information, conducting interviews, traveling back and forth from Vermont to the

Dominican Republic, and thinking and musing about the Mirabal sisters, I took a deep breath and decided, okay, I'm gonna write this book! I was terrified. How dare I take on these huge, mythic lives and pretend or presume that I could render them on paper? I had done the caterpillar homework, as I told you, years and years of reading and research. I had found helpers along the way, who reminded me not to let the Mirabal story die. Among them, of course, Dedé Mirabal, the surviving Mirabal sister, whose incredible courage is what has kept the story alive over the years. But now it was time for number three. I had to write the book.

I said a prayer. I lighted many candles. I sharpened all my pencils and rearranged all the books on my desk. And then, I set out. And you know what? This part which seems the dramatic, exciting part where you step into the stretch limo of your talent and ride your way to glory doesn't happen that way. You write a novel the way you fly, not with majestic soaring strides but wing stroke by wing stroke, word by word. And once you get there, to the top of that mountain or to the end of that novel, what you most remember and what you find yourself talking about years later is the journey there.

So don't be fooled by goals. What a goal is really for is to help you structure the journey, but the journey is what is important. The process of growing those wings is what is important. Once you get a first pair, there'll be a second pair to work for, a third. Writers know this. You finish one book, and already you are dreaming of the next one. Again you have to learn a whole new process in order to write a whole new book. Back to the caterpillar phase!

The lyf so short, the craft so long to lerne.

And the purpose finally of this process of achieving your dreams is to pass it on. The function of freedom, Toni Morrison once said, is to free someone else. Certainly the Mirabal sisters knew this. As a writer, this is my credo, to share with you, my readers, all that I have learned on my journey. To tell you the marvelous story.

That is my particular talent, the craft of storytelling, but each of

you out there has your own talent, and your challenge and one of the purposes of your education is to find out what that is, to cultivate it, to use it, to pass it on. As we learn from the Gnostic Gospels of St. Thomas:

If you bring forth what is inside you
what you bring forth will save you
If you do not bring forth what is inside you
what is inside you will destroy you.

So, now that you know my three basic rules of becoming butterflies, you can coast through the rest of your college education, right? Wrong. This is just the beginning, as I mentioned before. The journey to become a butterfly is what your life will be about. The journey to this podium to get your B.A. four years from now—the courses you will take, the teachers who will inspire you, the friends who will help you, the enemies who will keep you on your toes, the books that you will read that will keep reminding you—this journey is what you will remember, what will make you the person you are, what will bring forth what is inside you so that you may pass it on to someone else.

So, Class of 2001, work hard and dream big and have fun along the way and don't forget to spread your wings. And as my mother and godmother used to say, after telling me stories on my birthday and on my saint's day, *Feliz cumpleaños*, Happy Birthday! *Felicidades*, congratulations!

[Re]cognizing *Hamlet*: A Cognitive Approach

BY MEERA TAMAYA

"In this regard, phenomenology represents a return to naïveté. It liberates sight and renders it attentive to all the richness of the real."

Paul Ricoeur, "Philosophy of Will and Action"
in Reagan, ed. *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, 70.

*H*amlet needs no introduction. Along with Coca-Cola and Michael Jackson, the play has acquired the status of a cultural fetish. The very name, Hamlet, rings a bell, even among those who may not have read the play: it evokes the image of a figure clad in black, given to extremes of introspection and violent action. The play also supplies quotes for every occasion. "To be or not to be" is just the most banal of them; others, whose source is often unrecognized, have become a part of the English language. The best known play by arguably the best known playwright in the world, *Hamlet* is a perennial box-office success and provides grist to the scholarly mill. A glance at the bookshelves in the library tells us that *Hamlet* is the subject of the greatest number of books on Shakespeare, who because of his prolific output (37 plays and assorted poems) occupies

more shelf-space than any other single author. Each age has a distinctive interpretation of the title character of the play: we have romantic Hamlets, Freudian Hamlets, anthropological Hamlets, and Marxist Hamlets. The dominant intellectual preoccupation of each era offers a new hermeneutical framework for the play.

The last decade of the twentieth century has been referred to as the "Decade of the Brain" (*New York Times* 19 Nov. 1996: C1) because, under the general rubric of cognitive studies, all aspects of how the brain works to process information and emotion, necessary for successful survival in the world, have been studied, resulting in revolutionary advances in our understanding of the mind. In *Hamlet*, Shakespeare dramatizes the problem of surviving and acting in a world that the prince has inherited, in which competing and contradictory ideologies make cognitive clarity difficult, if not impossible. The Marxist critic Raymond Williams has argued persuasively that ideology functions in our consciousness not only as a set of abstract concepts, but as "structures of feeling" (*Marxism and Literature* 132). In this paper, I propose to examine the role of emotion in Hamlet's cognitive processes. To avoid monotony, I will use the words *emotion*, *affect*, and *feeling* interchangeably, as though they were synonymous.

In recent years, cognitive studies have been at the forefront of research in several disciplines: philosophy, psychology and neuroscience. Philosophers Paul Ricoeur and John Searle, psychologists Richard Lazarus and Joseph Jones, and the neuroscientist Antonio Damasio have all come to the conclusion that the dualistic model of consciousness—*res cogitans* (the reasoning mind) and *res extensa* (bodily sensation or passion)—a legacy of the Platonic and the Judeo-Christian tradition, most influentially articulated in the seventeenth century by the French philosopher René Descartes, simply does not bear examination. The development of sophisticated brain scanning technology such as PET (Positron Emission Tomography) and MRI (Magnetic Resonance Imaging) have enabled neuroscientists to study the exact locations of brain functions. One

astounding discovery is that the neuronal pathways of reason and emotion are so intricately connected as to be virtually indistinguishable. The traditional assumption that the lower brain, the amygdala, is the regulator of emotion and physiological reflexes while the higher brain, the frontal cortex, is the seat of reason, does not do justice to the intricate neural connections between the two. *Emotional Intelligence*, the title of a book by the Harvard psychologist Daniel Goleman, has made the concept of EQ, Emotional Intelligence, almost as familiar as IQ. When the cover of *Time* (2 Oct. 95) asks in bold black and red type, "What's your EQ?" the concept is well on the way to becoming a buzzword. Even as I write this, the latest *New York Times Book Review* (1 Dec. 1996: 30) has a review of yet another book on the subject, *The Emotional Brain*, by Joseph LeDoux, a professor at the Center for Neural Science at New York University.

The neuroscientist Antonio Damasio demonstrates that while emotion can have damaging effects on the reasoning process, the *absence* of emotion can be no less damaging to rationality. In his words: "Feelings, along with the emotions they come from, are not a luxury. They serve as internal guides and they help us to communicate to others signals that can also guide them. And feelings are neither intangible nor elusive. Contrary to traditional scientific opinion, feelings are just as cognitive as other percepts" (XII). The title of Damasio's book, *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain*, could be the epitaph for the reason/emotion binary opposition which has plagued western epistemology. Indeed, current findings underscore the original meaning of the word cognition: derived from the Latin root *cognoscere*, the OED definition "to know" conveys the sense of intimate, experiential knowledge present in the biblical meaning of the word. In this paper, I will argue that *Hamlet* is an extended dramatization of a mode of cognition which I term *affective cognition*: a heightened, affect laden awareness of the phenomenal world, composed equally of sensory experiences, emotion and ratiocination.

Before I proceed to analyze *Hamlet* in the light of new developments in cognitive studies, it will be useful to consider briefly the sources of the play, summarize the main plot and outline the play's major thematic elements. Shakespeare did not invent the plot. He was a cultural parasite, a truly representative genius of his country. As everyone knows, the story of English and England is the story of rabid imperialism: political, economic, and cultural plunder from its colonies, so thoroughly assimilated that parasitic England flourished at the expense of, and nearly devastated, the host colonies. All of Shakespeare's plays have plots borrowed and transmogrified from British, French, Roman, Greek and Danish mythohistory. *Hamlet* is derived from Saxo Grammaticus' *Historia Danica*, in which the author describes a Danish prince, Amleth, indulging in indiscriminate slaughter to revenge his murdered father. Shakespeare probably chose this particular story because Elizabethans, a frankly bloodthirsty lot, loved so-called "revenge" plays, a genre derived from the bombastic and bloody melodrama of the Roman playwright, Seneca.

However, what distinguishes *Hamlet* from other popular revenge plays by his contemporaries (for example, Thomas Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy*, George Chapman's *Revenge of Bussy d'Ambois*) is that Shakespeare complicated, or problematized, the crude revenge formula by combining it with another, more scholarly subject: the study of melancholy. Shakespeare may have been familiar with Timothy Bright's *A Treatise of Melancholy* published in 1586; there was also a Renaissance vogue for the iconography of melancholy. Shakespeare's *Hamlet* may be summed up as follows: Hamlet, the prince of Denmark, mourning over the sudden and mysterious death of his father and in the grip of suicidal melancholy, is exhorted by a ghost (claiming to be the murdered father's spirit) to exact revenge on the murderer, who is none other than Hamlet's uncle and the present reigning king. The situation is further complicated by the fact that Claudius, the new king, has married his brother's widow, Hamlet's mother. The ghost commands Hamlet to

carry out the revenge without harming his mother, or "tainting" his mind. The ghost's revelations and Hamlet's reluctant promise to carry out the revenge, "O cursed spite,/That ever I was born to set it right!" (1.5.188-189) concludes the first act. But it is not until the end of the play, at the conclusion of the fifth and final act, that Hamlet carries out his promise to the ghost. For the most part, critical debate about *Hamlet* swirls around Hamlet's delay in exacting revenge.

Hamlet's supposed inability to act has generally been attributed either to excessive emotion or excessive thought. At one end of the spectrum, T.S. Eliot judged the play an artistic failure because its emotion is "in excess of the facts as they appear" (*Selected Essays* 125). Hamlet would have to be diagnosed as autistic or as having ingested the Elizabethan equivalent of Prozac if he had chosen to measure out his emotion in coffee spoons when faced by the following concatenation of events: the sudden death of a father while taking a nap in the sanctuary of his orchard (his death in battle would not have been so surprising); the "o'er hasty" marriage of his mother to an uncle who now sits on the throne depriving Hamlet of his inheritance, making his present situation perilous in the extreme. At the other end of the spectrum, D.H. Lawrence savages the prince as a "creeping unclean thing . . . Hamlet is far more than Orestes, his prototype, a mental creature, anti-physical, anti-sensual" (*Twilight in Italy* 75.6). Implicit in this emphasis on excessive emotion or thought is the Cartesian dualism between mind and body which has cast a long and almost ineradicable shadow on western epistemology.

Both D.H. Lawrence and T.S. Eliot were working within the Freudian legacy in its heyday. Lawrence's glorification of instinct, particularly sexual instinct, is too well known to need further comment, but T.S. Eliot's Freudian bias still bedevils much Hamlet criticism. When Eliot deemed the play an artistic failure because of excessive emotion, he, predictably, went on to state that "the essential emotion is the feeling of a son towards a guilty mother"

(*Selected Essays* 124). This emphasis on the Oedipal elements very effectively exorcises the political context of the play, so brilliantly evoked in the spare, staccato observations of sensory experience—the silence, the cold, the unease, all summed up in the opening, expository scene of the play by Marcellus' terse observation, "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark" (1.4.90).

The play begins within the traditional, ideological framework of gory, Senecan revenge tragedy, but by the end modulates into a remarkably modern portrayal of individual subjectivity, with revenge served up in the form or style of justice. Paralleling the change from reflexive revenge to reflective justice, two antithetical dynamics engage our attention: *inward* into the labyrinthine subjectivity of Hamlet through his emotionally charged, deeply introspective soliloquies and *outward* to his actions. These two seemingly opposite but related dynamics of the play should lead us to reformulate the central question: not *why*, but *how* Hamlet delays the revenge. To the question of why, the old joke suffices: no delay, no play. The delay *constitutes* the play. Hamlet constantly takes his emotional temperature, and engages in seemingly random acts while he delays. Rather than regarding these inward and outward movements as secondary to the main action, we need to ask ourselves how they *function* and *contribute* to the resolution of the play.

Before Hamlet can "sweep to his revenge" as he promises the ghost, he is engaged in a life and death struggle "to see" the materiality of phenomenon, *freed* from the obfuscating symbolic representations which constitute the privileged discourse of both uncle and father. "Seeing" clearly becomes for Hamlet a life or death issue, for his very survival is predicated on distinguishing between rhetoric and reality, seeming and being, friend and foe. His most urgent task is that of orienting himself in a familiar place grown alien, even hostile, a situation that contributes to his cognitive dissonance. His uncle is now stepfather and king, making his own position dangerously ambiguous, if not marginal. His mother, who should have been a fellow mourner, is happily celebrating her remarriage, and

his father's courtiers have transferred their allegiance to the new king without much ado. Hamlet has to achieve a degree of cognitive clarity in order to survive in a world grown murky with dangerous emotional undercurrents.

It is my contention that Hamlet's delay in executing the ghost's command is supremely *functional*: he engages in activities which help him achieve the cognitive lucidity necessary for survival. Here we need to further clarify the connection between emotion, cognition and survival. It was Charles Darwin who first considered the role of emotion from an evolutionary perspective. In his seminal work, *Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, Darwin proposed that the development of emotions and their expression are on a continuum with biological evolution, and may indeed play a crucial role in survival. At the most basic level, the search for food, for example, is motivated by a "feeling" of hunger. The frisson of fear, so beautifully described by Emily Dickinson in her poem about suddenly encountering a snake, *functions* as a warning not to step on "A narrow fellow in the grass." The feeling of danger, according to Richard Lazarus, is the result of a cognitive process he terms "appraisal" ("On the primacy of cognition." *American Psychologist* 39, 124-129). The adrenaline rush triggered by the fear, literally *moves* us to "cope" with either a flight or fight response. It is worth noting that the words motivation and emotion derive from the same Latin word, the verb *movere*. As Joseph M. Jones puts it: "In effect we think of emotion as something that 'moves' us to action" (*Affects as Process* 45). In other words, emotion plays a key role not only in cognitive processes, but in *motivation* and *action*.

Since Hamlet has to achieve cognitive illumination before he is motivated and literally *moved* to act, we need to examine the implications of the cultural tradition of melancholy that, besides the genre of revenge tragedy, Shakespeare drew on for the thematic resonances of the play. The OED describes melancholy as "a depression of the spirits." Indeed, the Elizabethan cultural tradition of melancholy emphasizes not the emotional turbulence associated

with grief, but emotional *stasis*. Renaissance melancholic figures suspended ordinary activities associated with daily living, to engage in morbid extended contemplation of, and ruminations about, the ubiquity and finality of death. Clad in black, the only shadow in the celebratory splendour of Claudius' court, Hamlet is the living signifier of melancholy, a state which goes *beyond*, and should be clearly *distinguished from*, ordinary sadness or grief.

In modern terms, Hamlet is clinically, suicidally, depressed; in his very first soliloquy Hamlet contemplates suicide: "O that this too too sullied flesh would melt, /Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew, /Or that the everlasting had not fixed /His canon 'gainst self-slaughter" (1.2.129-132). Shakespeare scholars are familiar with the different spellings—sullied, sallied, solid—in the Quarto and Folio manuscripts of the play. Whichever printed version we use for purposes of semantic analysis, it should be obvious that when the word is spoken on stage, all the different meanings reverberate in the closely allied sounds of the word. Hamlet is expressing the consciousness of the body as both too solid and corrupt, a feeling common to suicidal depressives, which often results in *inertia*. Hamlet articulates the loss of energy and capacity for pleasure associated with depression: "indeed, it goes so heavily with my disposition that this goodly frame, the earth, seems to me a sterile promontory; this most excellent canopy, the air, look you, this brave o'erhanging firmament, this majestical roof fretted with golden fire, why it appeareth nothing to me but a foul and pestilent congregation of vapors" (2.2.298-304). It is obvious that Hamlet's melancholy goes beyond sadness or grief; it is closer to the emotional numbness described by Coleridge in his poem "Ode to Dejection": "A grief without a pang, vivid, dark, and drear. /A stifled, drowsy, unimpassioned grief." Coleridge goes on to register the beauty of the moon and sky much as Hamlet notes the "majestical roof fretted with golden fire" without *feeling* it: "I see, not feel how beautiful they are."

The major premise of this paper is that "seeing" without "feeling" is not cognitive in the deepest, experiential sense, and there-

fore, not very useful for the rigorous demands of surviving, living, and acting in the world. It is that frisson of fear that alerts us to the narrow fellow in the grass and supplies the adrenaline rush to move away from the danger. The distinction between two kinds of knowledge—knowledge by description and knowledge by acquaintance—proposed by William James will clarify matters further. The difference can be summed up as follows: knowledge by description is linear, analytical and interpretive, while knowledge by acquaintance, acquired through sensory experience, tends to be holistic and syncretic. In James's words, "Through feelings we become acquainted with things, but only by our thoughts do we know about them. Feelings are the germ and starting point for cognition, thoughts are the developed tree" (*Principles of Psychology* 222).

If feeling or affect is an essential aspect of cognition, then Hamlet's situation is dire indeed. If, as I have argued, far from being too emotional, Hamlet is actually struggling with the emotional and physical inertness that is symptomatic of suicidal depression, then his primary task is to quicken (in the biblical sense that distinguishes between "the quick and the dead") his emotions, so that he can achieve the cognitive ability to see through the rhetorical verbiage that surrounds him. When Claudius urges Hamlet to stay in Denmark: "And we beseech you, bend you to remain/Here in the cheer and comfort of our eye,/Our chiefest courtier, cousin, and our son." (1.2.115-117), Hamlet has to be able to sense the danger in such proximity, in spite of verbal assurances to the contrary; for "the cheer and comfort" of Claudius' eye is indistinguishable from the vigilant observation of a mortal enemy.

Hamlet's very survival depends on fastening his gaze on the material, the physical, which the rhetorical and symbolic often effaces and replaces. Both uncle and father use rhetoric skillfully to manipulate Hamlet. To borrow J. L. Austin's term, their rhetoric is "performative" in function. Claudius urges Hamlet to *forget* the past, while the ghost commands Hamlet to *remember*. Both ironically, resort to the same argument: each ratifies his own agenda with an

appeal to nature. Claudius condemns Hamlet's persistent mourning as *unnatural*, "a fault to nature,/To reason most absurd, whose common theme/ Is death of fathers," (1.2.102-104). The ghost makes an unchristian act, revenge, seem a *natural*, human imperative, "If thou hast nature in thee, bear it not" (1.5.82). The murderer and his victim appeal to nature to ratify their different goals: one to conceal, the other to revenge a murder. One is reminded of the French essayist Montaigne's clear-eyed vision of the social construction of values and their legitimation by an appeal to nature: "the laws of conscience which we say do proceed from nature, rise and proceed of customs . . . custom doth so bleare that we cannot distinguish the true visage of things" (Essays 1.114-115). Montaigne's articulation of the *misrecognition* of the social as natural anticipates the Marxist formulation of the concept of false consciousness: "the ruling class has to give ideas the form of universality and represent them as the only rational, universally valid ones" ("The German Ideology" 138).

Hamlet's major task is to focus on, and call attention to, the physical realities obscured by court rhetoric. When he decides to put on an "antic disposition," it further enables him to overturn conventional social systems of signification, so that he, "the observer of all observers" can "read" reality. It is significant that the very first person he confronts in his new guise of insanity is Ophelia, the daughter of Polonius, Claudius's chief lackey. Her description of Hamlet's behavior is precisely indicative of his new mode of cognition: "He took me by the wrist and held me hard;/Then goes he to the length of all his arm/And with his other hand thus o'er his brow/He falls to such perusal of my face/As 'a would draw it" (2.1.88-92). I would like to emphasize that Hamlet is not merely acting out his "antic disposition," but also seriously "studying" Ophelia's face, to glean the depth of her loyalty to him. The operative words are "perusal" and "draw": Hamlet *reads* Ophelia's face with the intensity that an artist would bestow on the subject he would capture in a drawing.

Hamlet's visual focus is not limited only to Ophelia; he reflexively reads the physical details of everyone who crosses his path. I will cite just two major examples. When he encounters a group of itinerant actors, he notices that one has grown a beard, another has grown in height since he last saw them: "O old friend, why thy face is valenced since I saw thee last . . . By'r Lady, your ladyship is nearer to heaven then when I saw thee last by the altitude of a chopine" (2.1. 431-436). Hamlet's attention to the players violates the decorum mandated by social inequality—for it is customary for the poor to observe the powerful as their very survival depends on the munificence of their social superiors. This is analogous to the relations between the sexes: women notice the moods of their men (while the latter are often oblivious of the feelings of women, especially if they are dependents), much the way dogs are alert to their masters' every move to figure out if it means a walk or a bone. Hamlet's attentiveness has no social boundaries and is, therefore, a radically revolutionary mode of cognition.

Hamlet's egalitarian attentiveness to what the poet Blake calls "the holiness of minute particulars" is similar to the emphasis on the visual, the physical and the grotesque which, according to the Russian critic Bakhtin, forms the core of carnival, the popular folk-festival which briefly overturns state authority and social hierarchy in such celebrations as Mardi Gras and Halloween. The key element of carnival, in its diverse cultural manifestations, is exaggerated costumes which call attention to the basic physical functions—sex, hunger, excretion, etc.—of the human animal, freed temporarily from social norms and "civilized" constraints. The paintings of Hieronymous Bosch capture the anarchic spirit of carnival in vivid, even shocking images. While carnival grotesqueries celebrate animalistic life, they also celebrate death: for example, during the Mexican Day of the Dead and American Halloween, skulls, skeletons and other artefacts of death proliferate. Michael Bristol has called attention to carnivalesque elements in *Hamlet*, but I wish to elaborate on their cognitive function, the focus of my paper, particu-

larly as they coalesce in three nodal points of the play: Hamlet's staging of *The Mousetrap*; his handling of, and meditations on, a skull, and finally the duel unto death with Laertes.

First, the staging of *The Mousetrap*: when a group of players cross Hamlet's path, he asks them to recite "Aeneas's tale to Dido," especially when the Trojan hero speaks of Priam's slaughter (2.2.456-458). The parallel to Hamlet's situation is obvious—"the hellish Pyrrhus" pauses before he strikes "grandsire" Priam dead: "So as a painted tyrant Pyrrhus stood,/ And like a neutral to his will and matter/Did nothing" (2.2.492-494). The actor gets so caught up by his recital, especially when he describes Priam's wife Hecuba's grief, that Polonius abruptly terminates the speech, pointing out that the actor "has tears in's eyes" (2.2.25-31). While Polonius is embarrassed by this display of naked emotion, Hamlet reacts very differently. The actor's ability to feel Hecuba's grief becomes for Hamlet an ideal against which his own grief for a murdered father falls short: "What's Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba,/That he would weep for her? What would he do/Had he the motive and cue for passion/That I have?" (2.2.559-562). Later, he decides to stage a play "something like the murder of a father/Before mine uncle. I'll observe his looks,/ I'll tent him to the quick. If 'a do blench,/ I know my course." (2.2.595-598).

Hamlet stages *The Mousetrap* ostensibly to "catch the conscience of the king" (2.2.617). He achieves his purpose, the king starts up in great agitation and leaves abruptly before the play is finished. However, the effect of the play on Hamlet has not received enough critical attention; he moves from the inertia of melancholy to a kind of excited energy and sings a doggerel: he seems almost manic. Significantly, he does not talk about the king's guilt, but about his own artistic success and how it may point to a new vocation, if his own fortunes fail him: "Would not this, sir...get me a fellowship in a cry of players?" (3.2.282-284).

The man who cannot act, the man who procrastinates revenge, has succeeded in *staging* an action. The enactment not only confirms Claudius' guilt as it was intended to do, but more importantly,

energizes Hamlet. Earlier, he had admired the actor's ability to identify with a fictional character: now Hamlet himself achieves such an identification. It should be noted that in *The Mousetrap* the poisoner is not a brother, but a nephew to the king. The murderer and revenger are (im)moral coevals, and Hamlet's identification with the nephew clarifies his own role in a possible future resolution. The visualization functions much the same way athletes are trained to picture a move so that they can perform it. This visualization is crucial for Hamlet, because after all, he has only the ghost's word about the murder. The ghost is an insubstantial entity which, as Hamlet says, may be "a spirit of health or goblin damned" (1.4.40). Shakespeare's audience was familiar with the controversy about the dubious ontological status of ghosts. The theatrical production, with the flesh and blood actors acting out the murder, validates the ghost's rhetoric with corporeal substance. This *mimesis*, the imitation of an action, as Aristotle defined drama, also achieves the function of *catharsis* for Hamlet: it confirms and validates Hamlet's intuition, his "Prophetic Soul," and releases him from the stasis of melancholy into a state of emotional excitation.

Revenge may be well served by an excess of emotion; Francis Bacon termed revenge a form of wild justice, marked as the critic Catherine Belsey has noted, by excess. Shakespeare, however, juxtaposes Hamlet against other wild men of action: Fortinbras who finds "quarrel in a straw", and Laertes who is prepared "To cut his [Hamlet's] throat i'th church." (4.6.127). After the exultation of successfully staging *The Mousetrap*, Hamlet constructs a verbal image of himself as a traditional revenger: "Now could I drink hot blood/ And do such bitter business as the day/ Would quake to look on" (3.2.390.293); however, when he finds the king alone, at prayer, he balks at killing him. His rationalization is that by killing the king at prayer, Claudius would be dispatched to heaven, not hell, a more appropriate place for him. It is a serviceable enough rationalization, as most rationalizations are, but judging from his other actions, it becomes apparent that Hamlet cannot take violent action without immediate provocation.

Hamlet stabs Polonius and dispatches his old schoolfellows to their deaths without hesitation; however, unlike Claudius, Hamlet kills on impulse, retaliating in self-defense to perceived threat: he mistakes Polonius who is eavesdropping behind the arras on behalf of the king, he sends his schoolfellows, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, to their deaths, because they are carrying the warrant for his own execution. Hamlet can act precipitately when, becoming cognizant of danger, his emotions are aroused and he is *moved* to action. Hamlet and Claudius are mighty opposites not only in their deadly power struggle, but in their *modus operandi*. It is the latter which radically distinguishes Shakespearean protagonists from his villains. Claudius, for example, kills after careful deliberation and crafty planning, a process in which the reasoning, logical mind, fueled by ambition and greed, abrogates emotional bonds. Hamlet, like Shakespeare's other protagonists, kills on impulse, in improvisatory reaction to immediate provocation. I shall elaborate on the significance of this difference when I discuss the duel scene at the conclusion of the paper.

From the theatrical representation of murder, or to use Wendy Steiner's formulation, "the virtual reality" of art, Hamlet's journey on the road to cognitive acuity culminates in a confrontation with the physical detritus of death. After his return from the aborted journey to England, Hamlet pauses once again to bestow his total, concentrated attention on a seemingly random, unlooked for event: the digging of a grave. As the gravedigger tosses aside skulls and bones, singing all the while, Hamlet reflexively assumes his characteristic stance: all the senses alert to the materiality of death, the feel, the smell, the look of a skull freshly dug out of the earth. His commentary to Horatio, however, goes beyond sensory observations. After speculating on whether the skull could be that of a politician or a courtier, or a lord, Hamlet concludes, "Here's fine revolution, and we had the trick to see't. Did these bones cost no more the breeding, but to play at loggats with them? Mine ache to think on't" (5.1.90-93).

"The trick to see't." Hamlet has finally become cognizant not only about the immediate visual and sensory aspects of death but also of the cosmic cycle of birth and death. He sees with the physical as well as the "mind's eye," the immediate, the here and now, as well as the "fine revolution" from the cradle to the grave. When he sees the bones tossed aside so callously (earlier, Hamlet has remarked that the gravedigger "has no feeling of his business"), he feels the ache of futility in his own. For Hamlet, then, to see is to think *and* feel, obliterating the boundary between the I and Thou, in Martin Buber's phrase. It is this identification of the self with the other, and the universe, with its commingling of randomness and causality, that enables Hamlet to accept the king's challenge to a duel with Laertes in the spirit of what I can only describe as resigned readiness. As he tells Horatio, he has misgivings about the king's offer, but "the readiness is all. Since no man, of aught he leaves, knows what is't to leave betimes, let be." (5.2.222-224).

This paradoxical attitude of surrender *and* readiness to whatever may befall empowers Hamlet to turn his *modus operandi* to such triumphal yet tragic effect. Hamlet's style of action is best described in Hamlet's own phrase: "For 'tis the sport to have the enginer/Hoist with his own petar" (3.4 206-207). The element of chance, which makes nonsense of man's best laid plots, aids Hamlet. In a scuffle during the duel, he picks up Laertes' sword, which has been poisoned by Claudius, mortally wounds Laertes, who indicts the king before he dies. When the Queen drinks the poisoned wine meant for Hamlet, and realizes she is dying, she too adds her "dying voice" to the testimony against Claudius. These public proclamations and incontrovertible evidence of Claudius' guilt provide the auditory and specular proof and provocation that Hamlet needs for swift action. Watched by an unprotesting court, Hamlet runs Claudius through with the poisoned sword, and in a gesture worthy of his literary forebear, Amleth, forces the King to drink his own poison. When Hamlet finally accomplishes his purpose, he does so in his characteristic style: impulsive and improvisatory. Familial revenge is served

up in the form of a public execution, attested to by the testimony of Laertes and Gertrude and witnessed by all. Hamlet manages to impose his unique *style* on an action mandated by the outdated ideology of revenge commanded by his father.

Style is a much bandied about word, trailing in its wake more than a whiff of the superficial and the frivolous. The OED defines style as a "manner of expression, manner of writing or manner of executing a task." I would argue that if our subjectivity is indeed overdetermined by a combination of genes, neurotransmitters, and socio-economic forces, then style is the only arena in which we can express our individuality, however much individuality or essence is a cultural construct. Even if an "authentic self" is a fiction, its affective properties are *felt* as real. Hegel's assertion that only the rational is real does not take into account that for all the lip-service paid to "rational" propositions, the moving force behind ideological commitments is emotion. The violence, often suicidal, perpetrated by religious and political extremists is just one obvious example. Style, then, can be described as the impress of emotion on action, the defining gesture of *felt* authenticity.

A cognitive approach to *Hamlet*, by deconstructing the traditional binary opposition between mind/body, reason/emotion, content/form, substance/style, has, I hope, illuminated the play as a *dramatization* of an experiential *process*. For the audience, cognition of *Hamlet* functions like a re-cognition of the human need for a heightened affective life, a distinctive style or mode of being. After all, it is a distinguishing feature of the human animal that basic, physical survival in terms of food, shelter and sex is never enough; to be human is also to be driven by the need to *feel* alive, with all the senses, emotion and imagination enhanced and fully engaged. Religion, however dubious its origins and claims, mobilizes the symbolic forms—icons, architecture, music, liturgy, spectacle etc.—in ritual practices that address the crucial need for emotional engagement. Drama's origins in ritual (the cult of Dionysus in ancient Greece and medieval liturgy in England) ensure that at its most

affective, it functions like a ritual process that clarifies *and* enacts in mimetic form the cognitive struggle to both identify *and* distinguish the Self from the Other. An interpretation of *Hamlet* as a dramatization of a cognitive process should contribute to our understanding of the play as a cultural fetish that resonates in our imaginative and emotional life. "To be or not to be" is *not* the question; *Hamlet is*: a haunting presence reminding us of what is due to our affective selves, so often forgotten in the clamor of our quotidian lives.

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The Note

BY PAUL MILENSKI

Tuesday, May 6, the prediction—a severe rain storm and emergent cold front, but at noon the sun was shining, so I grabbed worms, hip boots, pole, and creel for trout fishing.

I left a note to Beverly:

“Walking to the falls, fishing the brook down to Cleveland Road. Be home about 3:00.”

We had talked about these notes, why I should leave them when I wandered off into wilderness. My contention was they were superfluous. Hers was that in tragedy it would save her the agony of uncertainty: she could send a search team to ascertain death.

I crossed Route #9, walked past Dalton Tractor, up the dirt road to Wahconah Falls State Park, down the steep path to the falls.

I was alone, and though I intended to begin fishing farther downstream, I stepped into the end-race of the beautiful falls pool just to imagine I was the first to locate this pristine spot.

Wet with spray, and thus christened, I climbed up the bank and walked a winding downstream path.

When I stopped to fish, I was about a quarter mile from Cleveland Road, in a steep valley. Below me I viewed a small field, where a herd of red and white Hereford grazed silently.

Sometimes, I prefer worm fishing over lures or flies; my childhood is thus recollected and I repeat the challenge of the primitive angler.

I cast into a long, deep run along a clay bank. I did not get a strike.

I moved downstream, cast into a pool with a big rock. Again, nothing.

I moved further downstream. The herd of Hereford turned and stared.

"Hello, cows," I said.

Thus reassured, the cattle dropped their gaze and grazed again.

I cast into a riffle, saw a trout's opaque green form rise to shun my bait. It appeared thus: a slow day when fish are lethargic. I cast again, stared above and around me at nature's scenery.

Then, of a sudden, I heard thunder and saw dark, ominous clouds rush into the valley. A wild bolt of lightning flashed. More lightning, cold rain, then pebble-size hail.

The Herefords stampeded into a gully under saplings. Robins, cat birds, sparrows, chick-a-dees came spiraling past in a roaring wind.

I was knee deep in the river, my fishing rod a beacon for lightning, a single large oak overarchng.

I exited the water, ran wildly through lightning flashes toward a steep bank.

I dropped my pole and crawled underneath a large deadfall, into a coffin hole in the earth.

Viewed from indoors, a storm is placid. Outdoors, amidst lightning and thunder and hail stones hard as pebbles, one clearly understands primitive man's respect for nature.

A pair of titmice flew from a berry patch, perched near my feet on a little branch under the deadfall. They twittered, preened feathers nervously.

The wind spiralled tornado-like; brush, branches, and wet leaves spun about; hail cascaded as if thrown down from the sky.

A tree was struck by lightning. I smelled sulphur, and a large branch cracked and fell. Because I was already under a tree, the irony of my note to Beverly became evident—if another fell on top of me, who could possibly find me?

I counted between flashes and the lightning strike. One . . . two . . . three. Then just two, then one.

I pulled my jacket over my head, curled my legs to my chest, pressed deeply into the muddy earth.

It seemed I waited hours, the lightning flashing, the freight trains of thunder, the wind spiralling, until the storm settled into a steady rain.

When the titmice left, I scraped myself out from my tomb, retrieved my fish pole, and began walking. I humbly trudged up a hillside from the river valley, walked across a corn field toward home.

"I'm home," I offered when I slogged in.

"I saw your note," Beverly said.

"It wouldn't have made any difference," I said.

"I'm sorry, what's that?" she asked.

And it isn't until now that I respond: "The note is indeed superfluous. I rode out a violent storm where nature sends its own search team—twittering titmice, and depending on the depth of one's compression into the earth, friendly wriggling worms and burrowing moles."

Contested Beliefs and Rebellion in a New England Mill Town: *Sprague Electric Workers in North Adams*

BY MAYNARD SEIDER

Introduction

History reveals that the oppressed, be they slaves, serfs or industrial workers, have been more likely to obey unjust conditions than to rebel against them (Moore 1978). While conservatives might explain this behavior by minimizing the inequities in the system under analysis or by disparaging its victims, social critics point out that the monopoly of power which the rulers possess makes rebellion a very dangerous and unlikely occurrence. Yet rebellion, even revolution, does occur from time to time, even by the same people who previously appeared to be habitually obedient.

In *The German Ideology*, the leading radical analysts of industrial capitalism, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, note not only the material power which the capitalist class maintains over the working class, but also add that capitalist control over the realm of ideas helps that class stabilize its status.

The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas: i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it . . . (1965, 61)

Yet that is not the end of it. Through the process of struggling against the capitalist class, the proletariat may undergo a change in consciousness, casting aside the "dominant ideology" of the capitalists (individualism, competition, and mobility), and developing a belief system of solidarity, democracy, and collectivism, an "alternative ideology" of anti-capitalism (Allen 1975).¹

In this context, we may simply view ideology as an "institutionalized expression of ideas which concern either preserving the present or changing it" (Ibid., 267). The institutions that generally transmit the dominant ideology include the state, the media, education and religion. Alternatives may also develop within those institutions or in other institutions, like labor unions, where workers have more control.

For many twentieth century historians and social scientists, the task has been one of trying to understand why the American working class has not developed in a fully class-conscious fashion (cf. Fantasia 1988). In the past, the issue was often framed as "Why is there no socialism in the U.S." (Sombart 1906). Many, responding to the question in that fashion, argued for U.S. "exceptionalism." Under that model, class solidarity in the U.S. has been inhibited by racial and ethnic conflicts within the working class, mobility opportunities into the middle class, and a strong value of individualism. Presumably these, and other factors, were missing in Western Europe, and working classes in those societies developed a higher level of class consciousness as manifested in militant unions and socialist political parties.

More recently, the exceptionalist argument has come under attack, as researchers have uncovered more and more examples, often from case studies, of American working class rebellion and have reconceptualized our understanding of "class consciousness" (Fantasia; Lendler 1997). Rather than phrasing the question in an all-or-nothing way ("Why is there no socialism in the U.S.?"), this recent work suggests that a more fruitful way to ask the question would be: under what conditions do workers engage in collective rebellion thereby increasing their class consciousness? In examining the factors that facilitate, and inhibit, such behavior, one needs to understand both the material (economic, social, and political) and ideological conditions.

It is within this theoretical framework that I will evaluate a half-century of industrial history in North Adams, centered around the relationships between the local work force and Sprague Electric Company, a sizeable multinational corporation that at one time held the title of world's number one producer of capacitors. A dominant view, held by many in the broad community, perceived Sprague history as one in which employees and management worked together "like a family" (Burns 1989). Workers, while quiescent, were rewarded for their loyalty with steady work and a plethora of company-sponsored recreational and cultural activities. This view bears challenging on at least two grounds, historical accuracy and theoretical explanation.

Sprague Electric and North Adams

When I began researching this subject, my goal was straightforward: to describe the patterns of labor-management relations that developed at Sprague from its move to North Adams in 1930 to the huge layoffs of the 1980s. I relied on previous historical research, oral histories, descriptions in local newspapers, and a wide variety of materials in both union and company archives. I divided the period

under review into two segments. The first segment, from the beginning of local operations until the late 1960s, was characterized by R.C. Sprague's brand of paternalism and relative cooperation with the local ("company") unions. The second segment, exemplified by more formal and antagonistic relations, begins in the late sixties when national unions organized most of the work force and is highlighted by a bitter ten week strike in 1970.

In the course of my initial research, two findings surprised me: first, I discovered that a militant CIO (Congress of Industrial Organizations) union, the United Electrical Workers (UE), had made significant efforts to organize at Sprague in the thirties and forties, and in a massive campaign in 1944, had garnered about forty percent of the vote, despite strong opposition from management and the local union (Seider 1994); second, I learned that, in hindsight, many retirees felt that the ten-week strike of 1970 was ill-advised and actually contributed to the company shutting down operations over a decade and a half later (Burns).

The discovery of significant local support for UE during the 1930s and 40s surprised me because previous historical accounts and oral histories had virtually ignored it. The second finding also touched on the key area of social memory. Eighteen years after the events, numerous retirees conceptualized the strike as a mistake, even though the strikers had waged a strong, well-organized campaign culminating in significant contractual improvements.

Despite what the historical record seems to indicate, the key beliefs or dominant ideology held by many in the community sounds something like this: for the first four decades when labor relations were cooperative and harmonious, both the work force and company grew and prospered; but when the national unions violated that harmony, disaster befell the local employees, ultimately resulting in the massive loss of jobs. Functionally, of course, this version of events—this memory—supports the company's paternalistic "line" over the years. All will be good if you cooperate and carry out the wishes of the "good father," but disobedience will

surely bring negative results and punishment. However, as suggested earlier, not everyone accepted this dominant ideology, instead choosing a worker-generated alternative.

In this paper, the following issues will be addressed: How prevalent was the dominant ideology? What was the alternative ideology, and how did it develop? How did the struggle between the two ideologies get played out? These questions will be addressed by examining some of the major events of Sprague history and the reactions to them by key members of management and diverse groups of employees.

Paternalism, the "Good Father" and Company-Dominated Unions: 1930 - 1965

A reading of three local histories that cover this period, one written in 1942 (Nierenberg), a second in 1976 (Bliss) and a third in 1989 (Burns) leads one to conclude that the pre-national union era of Sprague history was characterized by a weak, complacent, low-paid work force that cooperated with its local, company-dominated unions and a resourceful, powerful management. Employees generally enjoyed work, created a family atmosphere in the mill, and had positive attachments to R.C. Sprague, the paternalistic founder of the company, and to an array of extra-curricular athletic, social and cultural activities.

Stewart Burns focuses on the comfortable, family-style relationships enjoyed by the predominantly female work force on the job. The pattern of "quiet unionism" (63) lasted for thirty years, until a new generation of employees opted for national unions in the late 1960s. Raymond Bliss generally agrees:

The [local union] came into being in the late 1930's under the auspices of management. The subsequent leaders . . . sought to make the most of the union that they had inherited

from an earlier day. As the [union] became outmoded, its leaders tenaciously sought to keep it alive and apart from national unions. Finally, though, [that union and a parallel office workers union] were displaced by AFL-CIO unions in the late 1960's (2).

Jay Nierenberg also argues that Sprague employees and their local union were weak, generally uninformed and too inexperienced to deal with a sophisticated management in the area of labor relations.

Sprague's control over the labor force emanated from three sources. Economically, the company managed a large labor force with relatively low wage rates as competing wage and benefit rates in the immediate area were also low. Politically, Sprague's strong connections with local economic and financial elites strengthened its hand within the broader community, particularly in contrast with the weak ties its work force had with other unionized and non-unionized groups of employees. And ideologically, the company had relatively smooth sailing. Its own paternalistic practices, which included an in-house newspaper and radio program, along with the support it received from the establishment media, not only fostered an atmosphere of support for its policies, but narrowed the space in which an alternative perspective might develop.

Management power, in and of itself, might be enough to explain the relative weakness of the Sprague labor force. Nierenberg and Burns, however, delve deeper within the employee culture. Nierenberg faults the very "intelligence and initiative" of the Sprague workers during a nine-day strike in 1941 (151). Burns, in examining the entire history of Sprague, nearly fifty years later, argues that the conservatism of the women workers can be explained

by at least three interwoven factors rooted in their personal histories: the respect for authority ingrained in them by working-class parents and the Catholic Church or fundamentalist

Protestantism; the 'Depression mentality' of these survivors who always felt grateful to have a job; and the wariness toward anything that threatened to disrupt the 'family' cohesion with its organic structure of interdependent relationships (79).

What can we make of this summary, admittedly brief, of previous histories of Sprague labor relations? First, we might argue that some of the authors' interpretations of events can be faulted and, secondly, different conclusions might be reached had the authors utilized additional historical sources. To begin, Nierenberg reaches his negative judgment about the strikers in 1941 in large part because he deems their strike an abysmal failure. Why? Because they only received half of what they struck for and lost nine days of pay. But, one might respond, wages are always lost during a strike, and managing to secure half of your wage demands against a powerful company might just as well be deemed a victory. Further, the employees staged a "wildcat" strike, against the wishes of their own weak local union, with impressive grass-roots organization and overall support.

From Nierenberg's own narrative we learn that the workers had organized a delegation of one representative from each department in the plant to present a wage demand and restoration of "certain (cafeteria) privileges" (140). When the company said no, 1,500 out of a total of 1,800 employees walked out. By the next morning, another 200 had joined the strike, leaving the plant with just "a skeleton office force."

About 1700 people jammed the street in front of the plant, and marched about in disorderly lines displaying huge placards. Approximately three hundred of the workers had their own cars there and were creating quite a fuss by blowing their horns without cessation. The crowd was obviously in high spirits. Drums and bugles were playing, and a make-shift band

was parading up and down. A good-natured policeman stood by and watched, but did nothing to stop the noise. Then someone came along with an effigy of Mr. Sprague, the president. This the crowd proceeded to hang, until the officer interfered, and made them throw the thing into a near-by stream (141).

Nierenberg's own description paints a picture of a well-organized and committed work force. While it also suggests that local police remained worker-friendly, it indicates that the persona of R.C. Sprague, symbolic or not, might have already achieved an "untouchable" status.² Further, we also learn that the workers hired two local lawyers to help them in negotiations, that mass meetings were held to discuss the issues, and that CIO organizers tried to influence the strikers.

Moving beyond the issue of interpretation, we might now ask what additional historical sources might we use to develop a fuller picture of labor-management relations during this time. Nierenberg's mention of CIO organizers in town provides a clue. Millions of American workers had already been organized by a revitalized industrial union movement under the auspices of the CIO during the late 1930s and early 1940s. In fact, the UE had organized huge plants not far from North Adams, in Pittsfield (Nash) and in Schenectady (Zahavi).

Bliss also refers to UE organizers in North Adams in the early 1940s but doesn't develop the story. For the most part, oral histories with Sprague retirees virtually ignore national union organizers, with one exception. Many workers remembered Gerry Steinberg, a Sprague production worker, as working for a CIO union. They also invariably referred to him as a "Communist." In some previous research (Seider 1994), I had examined the UE historical archives, looking for information on its activities at Sprague and for material on the role that Steinberg played during that time period.

The union archives, which provide a treasure chest of information, raise doubts about the model of the "universally weak, compli-

ant worker." Several extensive union drives were carried out, and local workers invariably played a key role. Documents indicate that UE nearly organized the production workers in North Adams in 1938 and, again, came close in 1944 when a huge union effort led by six organizers almost vanquished the coalition of company union and Sprague management. In 1948, the defeated CIO union came close again, and four years later, successfully organized a Sprague branch plant in Bennington, Vermont.

Another data source provided even more evidence that a significant proportion of the Sprague work force actively worked for or at least supported a more radical and militant union to represent their interests. Ironically, this source was the company's own archives, which not only contained a set of the UE local's newsletters and other union materials, but also held management reports indicating their fear of local UE successes. We learn that the company's well-developed strategy of stopping the UE included collaboration with Bill Stackpole, the long-time leader of the local union.³

This additional evidence, of course, not only changes the narrative of worker behavior during the thirties and forties, but also calls into question some of the aforementioned explanations of worker actions (or inactions) by the local historians. Turning to Burns, for example, we must take issue with his focus on Catholic working class socialization amid a Depression "mentality" as explaining worker conservatism. Even if those factors helped to explain conservative worker behavior, how are we now going to explain the more radical activist behavior of another group of Sprague workers who *also* grew up Catholic and working class during the Depression?

We find both groups of workers, and their representatives, struggling for legitimacy, arguing that their perspective is not only best for the work force, but for the "community" at large. Thus, in 1938, James Wall, the owner of the Wall Streeter Shoe Company and a financial backer and friend of R.C. Sprague, tried to convince

UE opponents of the "company" union to withdraw their decertification charges against the local. The response from UE to Wall indicates the common ground upon which the battle of ideas was waged:

We believe that our action in forming a local of the U.E. . . . will not only aid a great number of family-heads and supporters of families to higher standard of living, but will be an important factor in creating a fuller social and cultural life for our membership and all our friends. We are ready to seriously consider . . . all and any advice which would help us achieve our aims, which are no different, we believe, than the aims of the people of North Adams as a whole. That is, to be better Americans and to make our city an example of prosperity (Seider 1994, 60-61).

Six years later, a similar struggle over "community" ensued, but this time hostility marked the language of both sides. In a series of rival ads leading up to a company-wide election campaign, the local union accused UE of being outsiders, "carpetbaggers," and Communists, and of raising local dues to enrich their national officers. UE responded with a list of local old timers who supported them, a photo of a backer's son in military uniform, and argued that a vote for UE was "the American way" (Ibid., 68-69).

A fuller picture of the Sprague work force now includes hundreds of well-organized local workers opposed to the local union, supported by an activist national union, dozens of pro-UE stewards on the shop floor, full-time and volunteer organizers, and a communications network based on an informative newsletter, radio and newspaper ads. With these resources, and confidence, these rebels proved able to combat the combined management-local union forces not only within the plant, but in the battle for ideas, within the community. We will see a similar struggle, and a comparable alternative ideology, in the late 1960s and in the 1970 strike when, once again, the insurgents gained their voice.

National Unions, the Strike and the Demise of Sprague: 1966 - 1987⁴

Fueled by war orders, Sprague Electric grew enormously during the forties, ultimately expanding into the 29 building complex that had been the Arnold Print Works and now houses the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art. After World War II, the aerospace market added to military orders and the development of television aided the company's continued growth. From 1940-1967, sales and earnings climbed an astounding annual average of 16.5 percent. In 1967, now a *Fortune* 500 company and the nation's leading producer of capacitors, Sprague Electric cleared a profit of \$8.8 million on sales of over \$141 million.

A year earlier, local employment at Sprague reached its highest level, 4,137, an enormous number for a city of less than 20,000 people. However, the local work force accounted for just one third of Sprague's 12,000 employees located at more than two dozen world-wide locations. In late 1966, production workers in North Adams voted out their long-time local union for an AFL-CIO affiliate, the International Union of Electric Workers (IUE). In 1969, the office and technical workers dumped their local union for the American Federation of Technical Employees (AFTE).

Walter Wood, IUE's president, represented a new generation of Sprague worker, more formally educated, more knowledgeable in the area of labor relations, less provincial and more militant. Wood had served as president of the previous union, and using that position, persuaded the production and maintenance workers to shift allegiance to an international union. Throughout the fifties and sixties, pay increases did not keep pace with prices, and as the company grew, it also became more impersonal. As Wood put it, "They forgot about us." The new union nearly struck in 1967, but at the last moment, at an outdoor meeting attended by over 1500 workers, IUE Local #200 held back.

Negotiations for the next contract began in 1969 and during that

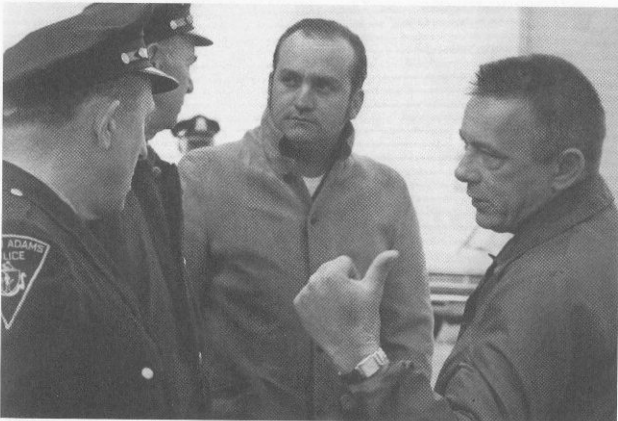
period and the strike to follow, R.C. Sprague himself kept in close contact with his industrial relations staff, asking questions, making suggestions, and enforcing final decisions. He was a stubborn "father," one who didn't like to be crossed, and one who believed that internal arguments should be kept within the family. Not surprisingly, he strongly opposed arbitration as the final step in the grievance process, since that would cede authority to an outsider. He also rejected union demands for a contract that would require new workers to join the union. Approaching seventy years of age but still vigorously running the company, R.C.'s spirit and actions dominated the negotiations. He took it all personally, never really believing that *his* workers would strike. But his employees, increasingly aware of working conditions and labor contracts in comparable settings, seemed willing to reject the "family" model, to say "no" to the patriarch, even if it meant withholding their labor.

In February, each of the three unions voted for strike authorization. As positions hardened, all sides used the local newspaper, the *Transcript*, through ads, letters and interviews to take their case to the broad community. Long-time *Transcript* editor James A. Hardman, Jr. cautioned the unions about striking: "The community . . . hopes the unions will be realistic in assessing what is possible, and will not embark on a fruitless battle which might cost them more, in the end, than they can gain." While the local newspaper tended to be moderate and measured in tone, it appeared to tilt toward management at this point, and maintained an increasingly pro-management posture throughout the strike. Fifteen years earlier, Hardman had incurred the wrath of R.C. Sprague when he criticized the company for its heavy-handed opposition to Dragon Cement Company moving into town. But this time around, Hardman spared management from his critical pen and when the strike ended in May, R.C. Sprague personally thanked him for his support.

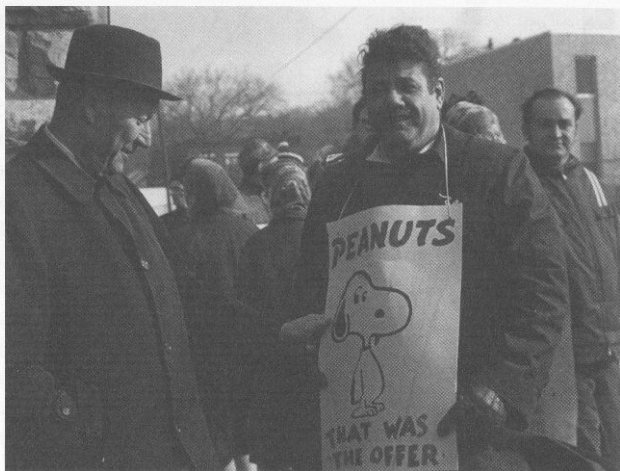
Once the strike began, the company set into motion its plan to manufacture capacitors with management personnel. Since only 5



Office and technical workers (AFTE) begin the strike on a wintry day. Production workers, across the street, honor the picket lines and later officially join the strike themselves.



Walter Wood, president of the production workers union (IUE), gestures to local police officers, while Joe Lora, chief steward of the machinists' union, looks on.



R.C. Sprague, founder and chairman of the company, shares a light moment at the picket line with Bill Pratt.



Tempers flare by the Marshall Street gatehouse.

Thanks to the North Adams Transcript for permission to reprint all four photos.

percent of the workers scabbed, Sprague received little help from experienced line and office workers. On the picket line, the rebels managed to hold firm, often marching belly to backside, in three concentric circles, determined to build solidarity and keep scabs out. Union leadership rose to the occasion, maintaining a disciplined organization, publishing numerous strike bulletins and keeping its membership well-informed of developments. In the community itself, both management and labor battled to win the hearts and minds of those outside of the Sprague (now estranged) family. The company presented its side of the story with full page ads in the *Transcript* and with radio programs. Editorially, the radio station gave a vigorous defense of Sprague, while it tore into the union leadership for keeping the strike going.

Mabel Lewitt, one of the union pioneers back in the thirties, walked the picket line now, as did her husband. But the stipend they received from the union wasn't nearly enough to support themselves.

We picked ferns and sold them . . . [Y]ou go to the undertaker parlor, all the ferns that they put on the . . . flowers there. . . You go in the woods and you pick them up. Then you have to count them, twenty-five in a bunch and you . . . stack them. . . [T]hey got you so much a bunch. I think four cents a bunch. . . We made better on ferning than we did working eight hours in Sprague's.

Personally, R.C. Sprague made a concerted effort to stay in touch with both management and hourly personnel during the strike. He directed strategy sessions with his senior management staff, visited each department, and talked individually and to groups of the salaried workers, suggesting appropriate tactics for crossing the picket lines. He tried his best to maintain civil, if not friendly, relations with the strikers, laughing with them as he crossed the picket lines four times a day. For some who crossed the line or who

tried unsuccessfully, he sent and received messages of support including one store-bought thank you card from three women who scabbed: "Mr. Sprague, Thank you for the free lunches during the strike. We appreciated them very much."

A tougher side of R.C. Sprague, one very much willing to use all the resources of power at his control, would also be revealed during the strike. As he had in 1955 when faced with the prospect of a new cement plant locating in North Adams, he raised the specter of permanent job losses. Within two weeks of the first picketing, he followed through, shipping about one hundred pulse transformer jobs to its branch plant in Nashua, New Hampshire. By the time the strike ended, the total number of jobs that exited North Adams totaled five hundred.

The unions maintained a coordinated approach in their own public relations campaign, reacting to attacks on them by the company and media, as well as proactively reaching out to the North Berkshire community. In a major speech to the Lions Club about a week after IUE joined the strike, IUE President Walter Wood explained the union's negotiating position to the local business leaders, and also offered a critique of R.C. Sprague's well-publicized speech to the Chamber of Commerce the week before.

In late April, with negotiations at a standstill, the parties agreed to try mediation in Washington, D.C. On May 5th, after twenty-seven consecutive hours of negotiations, a tentative agreement was announced. It brought with it economic compromises including a 6 percent increase the first year, and 5 percent raises the second and third years of the contract. As for the all-important non-economic provisions, the unions won binding arbitration and an agency shop.⁵ On May 8th, all three unions approved the contract, and Sprague workers had completed a giant step on the road to equity with unionized electrical workers elsewhere.

In the view of one of AFTE's leaders, Jack Boulger:

We ended up with a good contract I can remember (in Washington) . . . R.C. coming around congratulating the union committee on a very fine job, and stickin' to our guns and winning a fine contract and he told us that he had been beaten and we did a superb job—and of course then he came back and started moving the operations out of North Adams (laughs).

The Strike's Aftermath and Its Meaning

In 1976, R.C. agreed to sell the company to General Cable, which in turn was gobbled up by Penn Central Corporation in 1981. Three years later, with R.C.'s son, John, as President, Sprague Electric announced that its corporate headquarters would be moved out of North Adams, to the greater Boston area. Within the next two years, hundreds of production and white collar workers were fired, and, in 1987, the huge Marshall Street complex was closed. Except for a couple of small spinoffs, Sprague had effectively left the Berkshires.

In 1988, historian Stewart Burns (1989) supervised an oral history project in which more than two dozen Sprague retirees were interviewed. Only one "had wholehearted praise for the strike's success." Some who had been part of management thought the strike itself was "foolish". Others, who supported the strike originally, had come to view its consequences as harmful to the work force. Burns concluded that "much of the North Adams community" blamed the strike for the company's eventual exit from the area.

Why had so many former workers come to blame themselves for the departure of Sprague and hundreds of industrial, clerical and technical jobs from North Berkshire? In the battle for public support since 1970, the dominant view presented by the company and the

media had been one in which the local work force made a bad decision by striking, as it led to a direct loss of much-needed jobs. As long-time Sprague employee Norman Chenail saw it: "The company gave them that impression. That's all they talked about . . . Christ, it'd been in the papers for, well since 1970 . . . 'The thing that killed Sprague's in North Adams was the 1970 strike'" (Seider 1993: 41-42). In his recent book, John Sprague (1993b) reiterates the most publicized view: "The strike did more than cost North Adams jobs; it almost destroyed Sprague Electric . . ."

If the workers were to blame for the strike, and the strike led to the loss of jobs, one could take this dynamic one step further and argue that these strike-related financial losses caused the economic downturn of the community, a condition readily visible to the retirees when they were interviewed in 1987. With any trip downtown, they couldn't help but notice the empty sidewalks and the boarded-up stores, a picture far different from their memories of a bustling past, on Main Street and inside the factory.

Further, the dominant national economic and political ideology was not, to say the least, worker friendly. The Reagan eighties were a time in which corporate decision makers could do no wrong and fat-cat, greedy union leaders were fingered as the cause of industrial America's decline. The mainstream press heralded this view, and a weakened labor movement and rightward turning Democratic Party barely opposed it. So it should come as no surprise that union retirees would blame themselves for local job losses. Even a veteran unionist like Mabel Lewitt could say, in 1988, "Well, today I guess the union ain't no good, but then (1930s) it was good" (Burns 1989, 72).

Not everyone, of course, agrees with Mabel's assessment or with John Sprague's. Neil Welch, who succeeded John's father as Chairman of the Board, vehemently takes exception with John: In an interview after Sprague's book had been published, Welch argued that "by 1972, we got back all our sales we'd lost. By 1979, we had record profits of \$44 million . . ." (Seider 1995, 12).

In fact, the up-and-down economy of the late sixties and seventies proves to be a more viable predictor of corporate earnings than does the ten-week strike. Just as broad economic conditions impacted Sprague more in the long run than did the strike of 1970, the decline in local employment could not be solely, or even principally, blamed on the ten-week strike. The capacitor company had accelerated its building of branch plants during the 1950s and 1960s having made a decision not to upgrade its North Adams operations. Sprague employment in North Adams actually peaked in 1966, and began declining in 1967, three years *before* the strike (Seider 1993).

In any case, the dominant ideology (and memory) matters, even if it doesn't square with the "facts" of the case. And many in North Adams do believe that the strike did lead to the company's departure. Attached to that belief, many would also argue that if R.C. remained in charge, most of the jobs would still be here.⁶ If there is a Sprague to blame for local job loss, they point to John, president of the company when it left and a man known to dislike North Adams.

During an interview four years ago, John Sprague (1993a) noted the divergent views that former workers held of him and R.C. People, as he put it, have an "almost uniform love and respect for my father." Then John went on to point out another side of his father, tough and practical. Well before 1984, during his father's stewardship, some 2,000 local Sprague jobs were lost, many to reappear in branch plants built in cheap-labor, non-union locales. In fact, as John stated, more workers lost their jobs at the company under R.C.'s command than under his.

Conclusion

A close reading of events during both time periods illuminates important similarities. A significant number of Sprague employees banded together in the late thirties and forties and again in the late sixties and in 1970 to challenge Sprague management and its world-

view. To do so, they had to reject the paternalistic notion that all who worked at Sprague—employees, managers, and owners—belonged to the same family, obligating them to obey the father without question, and to seek harmony at all costs. They adopted a more conflictual “us” vs. “them” strategy in both cases, and achieved some success in that strategy by developing their own resources. In both cases, they started their own local unions, affiliated with strong national unions that provided them with professional organizers and research tools. Further, they published their own newsletters, spoke out in the establishment press, became a force in the political arena and made connections with other groups in the area. As they became more militant, they developed their own institutions and contested the power of management. They brought an alternative ideology to the fore, one stressing employee solidarity, workers’ rights, and a significant role in decision-making. In a reinterpretation of the family analogy, now the “children” were to be treated like adults, with a reserved seat at the table.

It wasn’t easy. The company and its allies, often fellow workers, had the best cards and fought vigorously. When the insurgents argued that they best represented the local community, the company made the same claim. When the UE and their supporters made their case to the press in 1944, the “company” union used the anti-Communist card and the entrenched tradition of localism (don’t send your money to the carpetbaggers) to fight back. And, finally, the company controlled the community’s economic resources, wielding the power of layoffs and, ultimately, the final closure.

While the focus of this paper has been local, one must remember that issues of ideology and social change need also be seen in a broader framework. Thus, regardless of any local initiatives, the massive conservative, anti-union national swing of the last two decades has made it very difficult for alternative views to develop. Conversely, we need to recognize that the dynamic national unionism of the 1930s, the strong support for the New Deal, and a presi-

dent who actually exhorted workers to join unions helped open a window of opportunity for local workers during that time period.

It is not easy to visualize broad economic and social forces. We value individualism in the United States, and tend to observe politics, sports, and entertainment by focusing on individual stars, cheering and booing them as the case may be. The canonization of R.C. Sprague and the demonization of his son, as explanations for our economic gains and losses, follow in that individualistic tradition. But if we keep in mind that R.C. wasn't always the "good father," then we might not view John as simply the "bad son," the one held responsible for the economic woes following Sprague's exit. This isn't to say that individuals, particularly those with a good deal of power, aren't responsible for their actions—they are—but it's a complicated world, and they don't control everything. Viewing history through the prism of a "good father" or "bad son" keeps us from seeing and understanding the broad national and global economic forces that affect us all, and focuses our attention on others, powerful individuals, either as knights in shining armor who will save us, or as bad guys in dark hats who will destroy us. Either version keeps most of us on the sidelines, waiting for someone else to make history. In the heady days of the late thirties and early forties, and again in the late sixties and in 1970, the working people of North Berkshire took a different approach. They looked to themselves to shape events, and in the process, while contesting the dominant ideology, changed themselves and their community.

Notes

- ¹ Antonio Gramsci has been the leading 20th century Marxist to develop these ideas. Gramsci uses the term "hegemony" to refer to the ideological control enjoyed by the capitalist class (Hoare and Smith 1971).

² This certainly seems the case for the police, although the workers themselves apparently didn't make a fuss when told to take the effigy down.

³ Established in the late 1930s, the Independent Condenser Workers Union (the ICW) generally supported management, and was viewed by many as a "company union" (Seider 1994 and Bliss).

⁴ This section is based, in part, on Seider 1993 in which citations may be found.

⁵ Under an agency shop provision, a new employee has two choices: to become a full dues-paying union member or to reject membership, but pay the dues.

⁶ During interviews, the "idealization" of R.C. Sprague showed no signs of abating. When faced with evidence of poor conditions or bad management in one section of the plant, more than a few retirees argued that "R.C. probably didn't know about it," thus sparing their positive view of the founder from facts they couldn't ignore. Others found it difficult to go on the record with criticism about him, even decades after his and their retirements.

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Two Poems by Abbot Cutler

Wednesday, Four O'clock

In the underground room the writer
stops talking. Someone asks a question
about markets. Someone uses the word
"formula", "agent", "distribution". Owls
fly up, their talons scraping the white
plaster walls. It becomes difficult
to hear. A fly goes around and around
the light fixture. Saxophones
start up and fail. Spitballs
that dried on the ceiling in the seventies
fall off without any sound. An old man
who has been dozing in the fifth row
is startled awake, gets to his feet,
asks, "What are those mushrooms
that come up by the old stump
after two days of rain?" No one
answers.

Walking to the car we remember the dog
we've been feeding for years.
What is his name?

Little Things

Somewhere there's a noise
in the house, something
that weighs very little.
In the wall. Behind
the bookcase. Overhead
in the attic. No matter
if our houses stick out
like a growth gone wrong,
no matter if they don't fit
snugly around the animals
in them, if they shelter
uncountable machines, have antennas
rising out of them. Mow down
everything around them, put
blacktop right to the door.
It doesn't matter. Small animals
will enter, scurry across
the ceiling, gnaw on the joists,
grin from the hearth,
eat your cd's, piss
on a leg of your kitchen table,
teach you a thing or two,
curl up in the hollow
of your soul at night,
try to do something
about all this.

Contributors

Julia Alvarez, whose Fall Convocation 1997 address appears in this issue, is an award-winning novelist and poet. Her novels include *In the Time of the Butterflies*, *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents*, and *Yo*. Her books of poetry include *Homecoming* and *The Other Side: El Otro Lado*. Born in the Dominican Republic, she emigrated with her family to the United States in 1960. Ms. Alvarez teaches creative writing and literature at Middlebury College.

Abbot Cutler teaches creative writing and literature at Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts. He is the author of *1843 Rebecca 1847*, a book of narrative poetry, and his poems have appeared in several publications, including *Ploughshares*, *Potlatch*, and the anthology, *Under One Roof*. Professor Cutler is the advisor for the annual publication of student writing, *Kaleidoscope*.

Paul Milenski is the author of numerous short stories and essays. He has won four consecutive PEN Syndicated Prize awards. A film made from his story, "Tickits," won the Gold Apple Award for the best educational film in 1993. An alumnus of Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts, Milenski is an educator as well as author. He currently teaches and supervises teaching interns in the Department of Education.

Maynard Seider is the author of *A Year in the Life of a Factory*, based on his experiences in a California transformer factory. He has also produced a play, *The Sprague Years*, performed at the College in 1995, using material related to his article in this issue. Professor Seider teaches sociology at Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts.

Meera Tamaya's essay forms the introductory chapter of a book on Hamlet, which she is now preparing for publication. Professor of English at Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts, Tamaya teaches courses on Shakespeare and other topics. She is the author of the book, *Colonial Detection: H.R.F. Keating*, as well as articles on John Sherwood, Kazuo Ishiguro, Margaret Atwood, Barbara Pym and Shakespeare. She also contributes book reviews and articles to *The Berkshire Eagle*.

THE MIND'S EYE

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While emphasizing articles of scholarly merit, *The Mind's Eye* focuses on a general communication of ideas of interest to a liberal arts college. We welcome expository essays as well as fiction, poetry and art, from faculty and guest contributors. We publish twice a year. The deadline for the Fall issue is July 15. Deadline for the Spring issue is January 15.

Submissions should adhere to these guidelines:

1. Submit unpublished manuscripts both on paper and on disk, using either PC or MAC platform word processing programs. Manuscripts should be typed double spaced. Your name, address, phone number and e-mail address, if available, should be listed on the cover sheet; your name should appear at the top of each page.
2. We will consider simultaneous submissions under the provision that the author notify us of this, and contact us immediately if the material is accepted elsewhere.
3. If you wish your manuscript and disk returned, please enclose a return-self-addressed envelope. If it is to be mailed off campus, attach sufficient postage. While we make every attempt to safeguard your manuscript and disk, we can not be held responsible for their loss.
4. Use MLA or APA style, with in-text references, as appropriate to the content and disciplinary approach of your article (See MLA or APA stylebooks for guidelines).
5. While we will consider articles of unspecified length, preference is given to articles under 20 pages.
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